This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

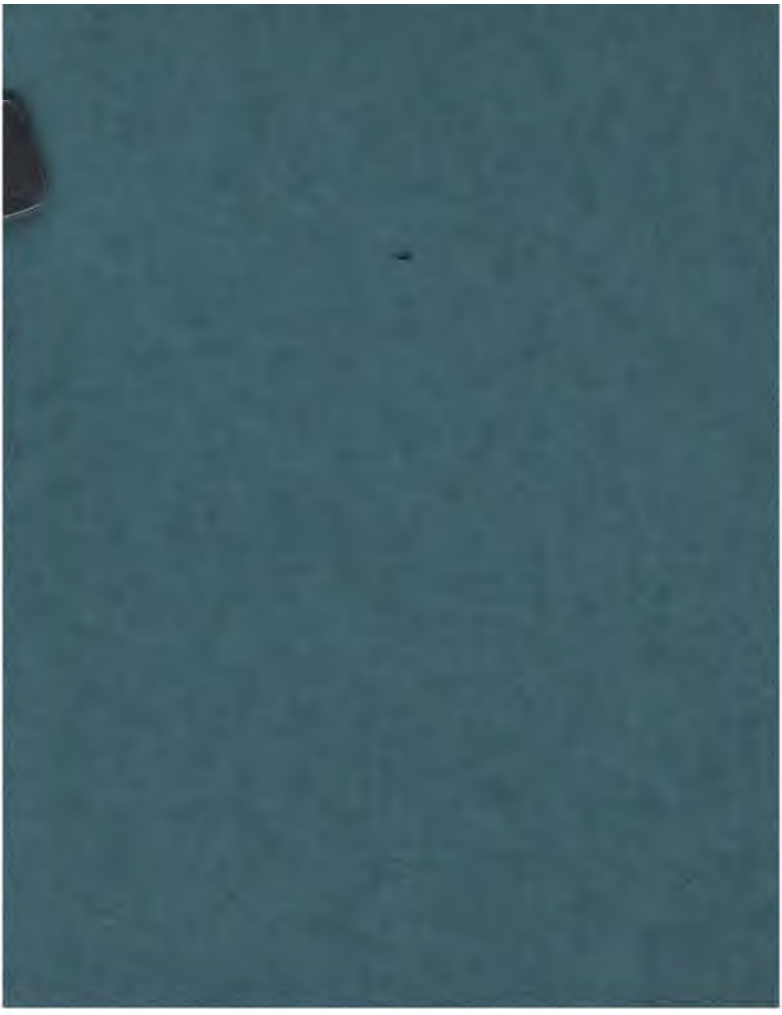
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

SUPER-PHYSICAL SCIENCE

STANFORD
LIBRARIES

BP565
S56
1919

A. P. SINNETT



SUPER-PHYSICAL SCIENCE

TWO ARTICLES

BY

A. P. SINNETT

Originally published in "The Nineteenth Century and After" for March 1916, and February 1917

The Theosophical Publishing House
American Branch
Krotona
Hollywood, Los Angeles, Cal.

1919

THIS WORLD'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

Religious emotion was, till recently, at war with science—especially indignant with astronomy for disturbing primitive conceptions as to the way this world was first opened for business. But a bold application of the principle that biblical language need not be taken at the foot of the letter gradually enlarged its interior meaning until the rotundity and annual revolution of the earth were fitted in to the story told in Genesis. Evolution as accounting for the human form then came within sight of a gloomy toleration—if Modernists insisted on it. That, however, which religious emotion has not yet quite realised is the sublime truth that, the more we are enabled to penetrate the deep mysteries of Nature, the more profoundly reverent we become in contemplating the impenetrable infinitudes of that Divine Power which operates alike in guiding the growth of protoplasm and the majestic mechanism of the Solar System. Critics who preferred—when Darwin first shattered the paraphernalia of mediæval theorolgy, like a bull in a china shop—to remain on the side of the Angels, made the immense mistake of supposing that the Angels (regarded as agents of Divinity) would be disestablished if we began to approach an understanding in the way they did their work. A view growing familiar with some students of Nature involves the idea that even natural forces are the expression of conscious will on some exalted levels of spiritual potency; that the so-called "laws" of nature are definite Divine enactments—not merely blind attributes of matter. And we can hardly begin to form a rational conception of the world's development under Divine control without including this idea in our thinking.

The reconciliation of religion and science has been advancing by leaps and bounds of late, and "Seven

Men of Science," all of the foremost rank, recently published a collection of addresses frankly declaring their belief in God, as a fundamental idea underlying scientific study. The record of the old "Conflict" is now ancienty history. But this result is not a conclusion. It is only a beginning. The seven scientific leaders, quite in agreement as regards the main proposition, may be groping in various directions in the search for a definite mental picture of the God in whom they believe. Perhaps all would admit that the reality does not lend itself to the formation of a mental picture. Religion reconstructed on scientific principles must build up a conception of Divinity by working from below upward. The earlier fashion attempted to work from below downward. "In the beginning" certain things happened, we are told—by teachers who, quite reasonably in dealing with young people, ignored the idea that Eternity has no beginning. But now that embryology must be recognised as a method of creation when we talk about the human form, we feel the need of an embryology as applied to planetary creation. And so we come to recognise the subtle, mysterious laws of organic growth not as displacing the Divine creative Will, but as the agency by which it is fulfilled in physical manifestation.

So by degrees, with help available at the present day, for those especially who realise that human consciousness can be reached by other channels of perception besides the five senses , we reach the idea that Divine agency is worked out through an enormously elaborate and magnificent hierarchy of Spiritual beings, beyond whom, in dazzling and (as yet) impenetrable mystery, there exists an incomprehensibly sublime Power, of whom the Sun may be thought of as the physical symbol.

In the mental search of God we may pause at this stage of the effort. Human intelligence is more limited *in its scope than* early philosophers imagined, but is

quite limitless as regards its expectations. It presumes to talk about the Divine power which accounts for the whole universe. Distant stars, though to be counted by millions and mostly gigantic compared with the star, or Sun, to which we belong, must come into the same creative scheme as the sparrows in Kensington Gardens. The Sunday School teacher can be content with nothing less than a God who is responsible for the Milky Way as well as for the milky mothers of the field. And mediæval painters have even presented us with his portrait. In some foreign gallery I have seen him included in a family group—the Father with a long beard is in an armchair with the Third Person of the Trinity as a pigeon perched on the back, and the Son in a chair of somewhat lesser dignity beside him. Enlightened members of the English Church would generally be shocked at this grossly materialistic presentation of the Divine Mystery, forgetful of their own declaration of belief that Christ ascended into Heaven and "sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty." From *The Fudge Family in Paris* we learn that a certain forcible expression, impossible in English, "doesn't sound half so shocking in French," and on the same principle an idea merely formulated in words that no one stops to invest with a meaning is not half so shocking as the same idea depicted on canvas by means of oil colour.

In the days of the old "Conflict' 'those who dealt with it—Draper and others—dwelt especially on the savage ferocity with which the early Church endeavoured to stifle astronomical discovery. Faith, at that time, might have been correctly described as "the faculty that enables us to believe what we know to be untrue." It was endangered by the astronomical emphasis of the untruthfulness in question, but in the long run, as astronomy held the field, faith fell into line with discovery, and in spite of ecclesiastical opposition became

ennobled in character. The God of a Semitic tribe might with an effort of imagination be fitted into an armchair. The God of a Solar System, including a central Sun many thousand times bigger than the Earth —and the orbit of Neptune thousands of million miles in diameter—was in a different order of magnitude. And if we attempt to strain imagination by looking upward in thought at that inconceivable splendour, we may realise the futility of the effort by attempting to gaze directly with open eyes on a fine day at the physical Sun. Human sight will not tolerate the unveiled light. Human understanding will not bring the God-idea, once cleared of blundering theology, to a definite focus.

But astronomical discovery does not come to a standstill, even after measuring the orbit of Neptune and accounting for the canals of Mars, nor after attempting, however unsuccessfully, to set time limits to the radiant energy of the Sun. We are all agreed—though astronomy affords scope for disagreement in some directions —that the whole Solar System—the Sun attended by his family of planets—is moving through space at about the rate of twelve to fourteen miles per second. Whither is it bound? Greenwich authorities would hardly yet venture on a definite reply, but we may if we like indulge, in connection with that question, in the fascinating pursuit known to science as "extrapolation"—the application to regions of thought outside the range of definite observation, of the assumption that laws operative within that range hold good to infinitudes beyond. Almost all the Heavenly bodies—quite all if we merely except meteorites and some comets—move in elliptical orbits more or less closely approximating to the circular form. Plainly, it is much more probable that the Sun's motion is in conformity with this general principle, than *that* it is a blind rush in a straight course, which would *infallibly in the long* run give rise to a cosmic catas-

trophe. If the uniformities of Nature are maintained, the Sun must be revolving in an orbit around some definite sidereal centre. Obviously such an orbit must be so vast that any measureable arc will appear to be a straight line.

And now I must venture to outrun even extrapolation in the explanation I have to give. I have been permitted in the pages of this Review to maintain the position that, in the course of the present "Armageddon," Unseen Powers embodying loftier knowledge than common humanity has yet reached are taking part in the struggle. Some of us in conscious touch with them are sometimes with their help enabled to anticipate future scientific discovery. In that way I was concerned, some dozen years before the discovery of Radium, with anticipations relating to the constitution of matter, ultimately verified by that discovery and subsequent work based upon it. Happily those anticipations were published at the time, so their character as a successful forecast is not open to dispute. In another direction certain future conclusions in connection with astronomy may be anticipated in their turn. The centre around which the Solar System is gravitating will be found to be the star Sirius. Common knowledge gives us an approximate measure of some stellar distances. The figure accepted by astronomers for the moment as the distance of Sirius, taking "light-years" as the unit, is 8·8, or call it eight and three-quarters. A light-year is the distance light crosses in a year, moving at the rate of 186,000 miles per second. So it would be inconvenient to give stellar distances in miles. Moreover, there is a wide margin for possible errors in calculations concerned with the parallax of stars. Perhaps it will be found that Sirius is a bit further off than the currently accepted calculation assumes, but anyhow the real distance is in the same order of magnitude. Estimates of the size and luminosity of Sirius vary very widely—from 300 to 1000

times the size and brightness of our Sun, but either guess fits in with the main idea to be grasped. Obviously our Sun cannot be the only one that revolves around Sirius. Directly that idea is appreciated, we realise that Sirius must be the central sun of a vast system, in which such suns as ours must be to Sirius what the planets are to our Sun.

That this is so can only be ascertained definitely by those in touch with sources of information not yet within general reach, but at all events, meanwhile, as a hypothesis, the statement is clearly in harmony with the uniformities of Nature. To regard our Solar System and all the others presumably represented by the millions of stars in the sky as scattered at random about space would be insulting to Supreme Wisdom and Omnipotence. The conception could only be acceptable to thinkers at the kindergarten stage. Certainly up to the middle of the last century grown and grave men did discuss the question whether this was the only inhabited world in the Universe, but increasing intelligence has rendered us at once wiser and more modest than when a doubt on that subject was possible. I need not go over the evidence that makes an important group of astronomers certain that Mars (to confine our attention for a moment to our own Solar System) is the abode of life not entirely unlike our own. The other planets may not have climatic conditions like our own, but the resources of Nature may easily provide vehicles of life appropriate to any conditions of temperature; while those of us who know something more about life, consciousness, and spiritual growth than mere surgery would suggest, regard with disdain the idea that any worlds—whether around our Sun or in the infinitudes of space—can be mere inanimate masses of matter destitute of the loftier purposes that life *implies*.

Just for the present all information relating to the

Sirian Cosmos must remain hypothetical until the astronomy of the future overtakes the forecast, but its value as illuminating reverent imagination reaching in the direction of Divinity is very great. It helps us to realise that in all such upward reaching we must blend with the idea of which we are in search the idea of infinity. In the search within the limits of our own Solar System we are hopelessly dazzled long before we touch those limits. But the conception of the Sirian Cosmos shows us that incomprehensible as the Solar Divinity may be—"That" (our miserable word "he" is degrading in such use) can only be in some dependent relationship to the Divinity guiding the whole Sirian Cosmos; in other words, that "God" is an infinite hierarchy. Faintly we realise that God—when we think of the Sirian Cosmos—is, in some wholly incomprehensible way, greater even (in a stupendous degree) than God, when we think of the Solar System and of the various worlds within it of which ours is one. And, indeed, human intelligence, limited in its grasp of detail, unlimited when reaching out towards infinitude, perceives, the moment this last idea is touched, that the Sirian Cosmos itself must be in relationship with some still more expanded and sublime organism; that Sirius cannot be a stationary body but must itself, attended by all its family of solar systems, be dependent on some other centre of energy, on some other superior manifestation of the infinite God. It is futile even to speculate as to where or what that centre may be, but the feeling that it must exist vaguely hints at a unity pervading the whole visible universe. Along that line of thought, however, lies a mental bewilderment that bars further progress. We can play in imagination still with astronomical figures. The bright star Arcturus is said to be 140 light-years distant from us, and yet it shines nearly as brilliantly as Sirius. What must be its actual magnitude and lustre? What must be its place in the universal scheme? And some other stars of almost equiva-

lent brilliancy are beyond parallactic measurement altogether. But the purpose which all fulfil must be within the grasp of infinite Divinity.

Science, growing more and more intimately welded with spiritual aspiration as human intelligence expands, grants us some mental illumination as we seek to penetrate, so far as that may be possible, the mysteries of the Divine Hierarchy. Certainly, if we turn our attention from the appalling magnitudes of astronomy to the phenomena of the infinitely little, the measurements we have to deal with are equally bewildering. Physicists tell us that a cubic centimetre of water contains thirty trillions of molecules. That if a glass globe four inches in diameter were absolutely empty and air molecules admitted at the rate of a hundred millions a second, 50,000 years would elapse before the globe was full. Such figures are more amusing than instructive, but they may help us, to some extent, in our attempt to formulate a conception of the Divine Hierarchy. The attributes of the physical molecules—the laws they obey, are obviously as much an expression of Divine Will as the forces that regulate the march of solar systems in the Sirian Cosmos. Within our Solar System the Divine Hierarchy extends downward, as definitely as, beyond it, it extends upward; and though, as we attempt to understand it in its lower levels, we shall soon find mental difficulties almost as insuperable as those attending efforts in the other direction, we can, with help from certain sources of information, arrive at some intelligible conclusions.

Astronomy may still help us to some extent. The conditions that must attend life in the various planets of our system must obviously differ very widely. Temperature may vary from below that of ice to above that of steam. Vehicles of consciousness—bodies of whatever matter may be suitable, must vary accordingly. We may safely assume that while some of the fundamental *laws of Nature may hold* good throughout the system,

others, for example all appertaining to organic growth, may need local modification. Each world must be controlled, even as regards its physical manifestation, by appropriate Divine Agency. And very little progress beyond primitive theology makes us sure that—first of all as regards our own world—there are teeming regions of life that lie beyond the cognition of the physical senses. Talk therefore of our familiar planets should properly relate to *planetary schemes,* embracing much more than the visible globes. So we reach the conception that for each planetary scheme the Divine will of the whole Solar System must transmit itself through an agency that is still so Divine in its character as to dazzle our mental sight.

None the less a very important stage in our study of the Divine Hierarchy is reached when we realise the principle of agency as working through it. The mind leaps to the conclusion that this principle must be operative right down to the subtle activities of Nature that we are in the habit of summing up in the word "Evolution." For the verification of this conjecture we must obviously be dependent on information received from those sources of superphysical knowledge above referred to, such information in turn being only subject to the check imposed by our own critical faculties. Does it appeal to our intelligence as essentially reasonable in its character? Leaving that question to be determined later, I will first endeavour to describe the agency through which the purpose of the Divine Power presiding over the planetary scheme to which this world belongs, appears to be worked out in physical manifestation.

We have to think of the unseen realms of Nature as inhabited by hosts of spiritual beings concerned with the direction of the forces (emanating from super-Divine Will) which not merely guide organic growth but provide for the growth of the spiritual essence with which such growth is associated. Language is apt to break

down in one's hands as a means of conveying ideas that are inextricably blended with still more subtle underlying ideas. We are living in a world the whole *raison d'être* of which resides in the opportunity it affords for the growth and expansion of spiritual consciousness. The experiences of consciousness in association with physical environment are the conditions providing for its growth. We may plunge down in search of the beginnings of such growth to levels of consciousness far below those of humanity. But leaving that vast area of thought untrodden, the growth of spiritual consciousness as focussed in humanity is itself under the guidance of Divine agency whose perfect uniformity of intention, fulfilling the Divine purpose—would, if we could see only a little more clearly, present to imagination a system of natural law on the moral plane as unalterable as the natural laws relating to physical matter that we deal with in the chemist's laboratory. Those natural laws of the moral plane are entangled with variable influences arising from human free will, but that only renders the task of the Divine agents who guide them more delicate, not less specific.

The first glimpses we get in this way, of the intricacy of the work carried out by the hosts of Divine agents engaged in guiding the world's growth, prepare us to find that a distribution of function is carried out in that wonderful realm of activity, so that while one great host is concerned with the growth of consciousness, another is concentrated on the task of guiding the growth of form—of carrying out the idea that, for want of a better comprehension of the process, we call the principle of Evolution. And such agency works again in its contact with matter through lower agency right down to the manipulation of the molecule. The Divine Hierarchy is infinite both ways; inconceivably exalted and inconceivably minute, but in the direction of minutiæ still conscious and purposeful. Intelligence, with a certain *range of freedom within* limits, guides not only the

gradual improvement of the human form, *pari passu* with the progress of spiritual growth, but the humbler development of form in the animal kingdom and even variation in the colouring of plants and flowers. The agency concerned with such work cannot be discerned by the physical senses, but finer senses can already sometimes cognise its operation, though most of us are still too young in evolution to have come into full possession of all the faculties latent in human nature. "We are ancients of the earth and in the morning of the times."

So brief a sketch as this must be content in some directions with mere faint hints. How do the Divine agents concerned, as declared above, with the evolution of form, translate their superphysical powers to the physical plane? The answer has to do with what may be called the semi-intelligent mechanism of Nature. The mere phrase is bewildering, but it deals with certain aspects of Nature that science must concern itself with before long. "Elemental Agency" cannot properly be regarded as belonging to the Divine Hierarchy even in its lower levels, but it constitutes a vast subsidiary evolution by itself; cosmic in its character; related to much more than the interests of this world alone; beginning on levels commensurate with the electron in magnitude and importance, rising to conditions in which definite forms in certain fine orders of matter are identiable by observers, with adequately clairvoyant senses, as associated with specific functions in Nature. Elementals constitute the link between will—human or Divine—and physical manifestation. Obviously the subject is one of stupendous magnitude. No fire could burn, no plant could grow, no human being could live on the physical plane, and carry on all that business transacted within his body of which he is wholly unconscious, without elemental agency. When science comes to grapple with the intricacies of this so far hidden aspect of

Nature it will look back to its present condition as one hardly emerging from the dark ages.

Thus vast and complicated is the agency by which Divine Will is fulfilled. But we have to struggle as best we may with the idea of hierarchies within hierarchies. The world is a theatre in which a stupendous drama is in process of performance. The scenery and decorations are provided by Divine agency, and the actors are responsible—if we push the metaphor to its extreme limits—for the parts they play. In other words, while Divine agency invests them with their opportunity, their own free will is left to determine the use they make of this. But they must not be allowed to wreck the whole undertaking by too gross a misuse of that free will. The drama is intended to have a happy ending. So, over and above or apart from the hierarchies that provide the conditions, Divine ordination provides for a governing hierarchy that does not actually control the actors—put words into their mouths, so to speak, or manage them like marionettes—but causes them to feel disagreeable consequences from blundering; invests them with larger consciousness as they willingly fall into line with the Divine idea. Of course that governing hierarchy is merged in its loftier levels with the superior agents of infinite Divinity, but on its less exalted levels is in close touch with our own humanity. This thought leads up to what is perhaps the most important idea of all that I have been endeavouring to suggest. Humanity itself recruits the governing hierarchy. Its members on the first important level above ordinary humanity have been, at some remote periods in the past, human beings like (the best of) ourselves. We speak of them now, those of us who have the privilege of more or less knowing them, as great adepts, Masters of Wisdom, Brothers of the Great White Lodge, or by any other phrases approximately appropriate, *They are in normal* periods equal to the task—under *Divine inspiration of* which they, of course, are vividly

conscious—of carrying on the government of the world in so far as it needs adjustment or interference. They are our Allies in this ghastly abnormal period in which humanity is confronted by an attack from such elevated levels of spiritual potency that, great as their power undoubtedly is, they can only for the moment resist the awful unseen foe inspiring our physical plane enemies, whilst awaiting intervention, ultimately certain if it becomes necessary, from lofty levels of Divine Power.

Will this view of the great current crisis seem, to some critics, at variance with the main idea that this world, like all others, is governed by an infinite Divine Hierarchy of quite limitless capacity and directing human evolution from the realms of infinite Love? The problem has been dealt with at some length in previous articles in this Review,[1] and need only be referred to now. Free will, in one word, is the answer. The ultimate evolution of individual humanity can only be accomplished by investing each unit with the Divine attribute of free will in a greater or less degree. Half-fledged humanity of the kind around us in abundance is hardly conscious of the extent to which it enjoys this attribute. It becomes more and more available as spiritual evolution proceeds. By the hypothesis it may be exerted to fulfil the purpose of Divine love, in so far as that may be discerned, or it may be perverted to antagonize that purpose. Within the limits of our humanity the perversion may not be carried to any extreme degree. But other humanities have preceded our own and have reached exalted conditions in which free will for good or evil was enormously expanded in its scope. In that way it has come to pass that spiritual evil has assumed colossal proportion until at last it has challenged Divine Power on very high levels. That is the challenge with which we, on our humble level, are now contending.

[1] "Our Unseen Enemies and Allies' 'and "When the Dark Hosts are Vanquished," *Nineteenth Century and After*, October and November 1915.

We feel sure of ultimate success because the mighty spiritual powers of evil at war with the Divine idea of humanity (on this plan with ourselves, the Allied armies) have had a definite origin that we can discern and have reached a definite height of spiritual power. However exalted that power, it is finite. The Divine Hierarchy is infinite. At whatever level Satanic power may confront it on equal terms, Divine resources above that level are limitless. If exerted they must subdue the finite power, and we have reason to feel sure that sooner or later they will be exerted to avert the ruin of the world.

I have said that our Allies in this great struggle—the Masters of Wisdom, or by whatever name we like to call them—the Chieftains of Humanity, of whose existence, till recent years, humanity at large was wholly ignorant, are recruited from amongst ourselves although none the less constituting the first great stage of advancement, counting from below upward, of the Divine Hierarchy. But while, beyond them, conditions of existence begin to transcend physical brain comprehension, we can understand to some extent the capacities and powers of the beings who have attained to them, and the functions appertaining to their stage of evolution. Certainly that mighty organisation includes some who reached high spiritual dignity before this world's children had emerged from early races, in one sense their nursery. But none the less it includes some who have been to outward appearance within historic periods mere ordinary men. The world, indeed, has never been without a great ruling Brotherhood, though at one time it was indebted for this to a Senior humanity. The phrase needs amplification to be fully intelligible, but a very little thought will give reason to the idea that the history of this world and of our human races is not a "complete short story" in itself, but an episode in universal history.

As our humanity became sufficiently evolved to fur*nish recruits for the* great ruling Brotherhood its ex-

istence was allowed to filter out graudally into the con-consciousness of the few candidates available. These were the few whose ardour in the pursuit of lofty knowledge and whose moral development were such that they could be trusted not to misuse enhanced knowledge. The world at large was not generally ripe for the proper appreciation of the fact that powers and knowledge beyond ordinary experience were attainable by certain means. A premature dissemination of that idea might have had unfortunate consequences. But for the chosen few it was revealed, and so it has come to pass that at the present day the great Brotherhood includes many members who have been men like (the best of) ourselves within a compratively recent period.

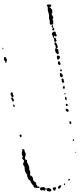
Experience of ordinary life does not enable us to understand their place in Nature altogether and completely. They work to a great extent on planes of consciousness beyond the cognition of the ordinary senses. They wield forces as yet unknown to Science, using the physical body merely as a vehicle to be occupied or left aside as convenience may suggest; the finest clairvoyance which ordinary students of that wonderful faculty have ever met with is, compared with theirs, a rushlight to an electric arc; and physical matter itself is plastic in their hands. In the higher vehicles of consciousness distances about the world mean nothing, and withal they are of course in absolute harmony with the Divine Will.

The view thus reached—that shows us the humanity to which we all belong as designed to recruit the first, as we look upward, of the spiritual degrees that in the aggregate constitute the Divine Hierarchy—is of supreme significance. Properly understood it invests humanity with an entirely new meaning, as compared with that which merely treats each item in that humanity as destined to an infinitely continued individual existence, happy or unhappy, as the case may be. The crude fancy thus presented to the mind by commonplace religion

may have served its purpose while the world was young, as coaxing or warning an ignorant multitude not yet ripe for more profound conception, but philosophically it is beneath criticism. The sublime idea, as directly affecting ourselves, to be derived from a conception, even if only broad and incomplete, of the Divine Hierarchy is that which shows it to be a coherent entirety stretching upward from this world as we know it, in the direction of absolute infinity. It enables us, for the first time, to comprehend this world's place in the Universe. A misdirected modesty leads some of us occasionally to talk of this world as a small planet amongst many greater, attached to a tenth-rate sun in a Universe richly stocked with others of enormusly greater magnitude and brilliancy. The infinitesimal creatures on its surface can only be regarded, in this way, as important in their own estimation; no more so really than the grains of sand on the seashore. That view is no less erroneous than depressing. The humanity for the sake of evolving which this world exists, represents a definite stage in the evolution of Divine consciousness, which, besides its limitless expansion towards infinity, is susceptible of infinite accretion from below. There are no stages in the Divine Hierarchy that have *not* been recruited, in some unfathomable past, from humanities more or less resembling our own. Eternity stretches both ways and the world—the solar systems of today, though figures would fail to suggest their duration as measured in our time, are manifestations of Divine power that have succeeded others and will be in turn succeeded. We count the nebulæ in the Heavens, and watch the growth of future suns destined to bear their progeny of future worlds and future candidates for Divine evolution.

But we need not torment imagination by following that thought too far. It is enough to know that here and now we are candidates for Divine evolution; that *there is no solution* of continuity from this stage of *existence up to those* that have been faintly suggested

in these pages and are hopelessly dazzling to mental vision as we dwell in thought on their attributes and power. This humanity of ours, even as we contemplate its visible varieties from the savage to the greatest philosopher, is obviously a vast procession moving through the ages, each immortal spirit ever seeking new and new incarnations till gathered experience and effort entitle it to those of the loftiest order. The appreciation of this idea marks a huge advance beyond the primitive conception of an eternal perpetuation of each grotesquely incomplete being. But such an appreciation is merely a step in the direction of the grander conception. The highest level of moral and intellectual attainment on the stage of this world's potentialities is but a new beginning, a point of departure for a process beyond the precise comprehension of physically incarnate intelligence, but happily not altogether veiled from our view. No matter for the moment whether there be other worlds affording still more favourable opportunities for embodied consciousness. That is no concern of ours. We may be fully content to know that however the preparatory processes leading up to the Divine Hierarchy may be provided for in other worlds, this of ours has a place in the Universe in direct relation with all the infinitudes that simple word represents—with all that the most illuminated reverence can suggest when we presume to speak of God.



LIFE AFTER DEATH

Future Life—and Lives

Naturally enough the tragedies of the War have imparted thrilling interest to some questions carelessly disregarded by the multitude during normal periods. Is there an after-life for all of us when we "die"? Can we find out anything about it in advance? Can we communicate with those who have already passed on? Most current essays dealing with such perplexities have a ludicrous aspect for millions of spiritualists in constant touch with departed friends, for all occult students and for most psychic researchers. A writer in these pages last month calmly asserts that communication with the dead "has never been definitely proved to be anything but delusion or fraud." If equally ignorant in other directions he might deal in the same way with any scientific discovery, say, the retrograde motion of some planetary satellites, or, the transmutations of radium. The vast literature of spiritualism is flooded with proof of the main idea. More recently the literature of occult research is rich in detail concerning the conditions of the after-life.[1] To say that knowledge thereof has made

[1] Simply to show that I am not talking at random I will mention a few books the perusal of which would guard writers of a certain class from making themselves ridiculous: *Spirit Identity, Psychography, The Higher Aspects of Spiritualism, Spirit Teachings, A Wanderer in Spirit Lands, The Story of Ahrinziman, Colloquies with an Unseen Friend, Out of the Vortex, After Death, Not Silent Though Dead, In the Next World, Do Thoughts Perish?, The Hidden Side of Things, The Inner Life, Esoteric Buddhism, The Growth of the Soul, The Occult World, The Secret Doctrine, A Study in Consciousness, The Ancient Wisdom.* Some of the books named relate to Spiritualism, some to Theosophy or occult science generally. They are a mere handful compared with any complete bibliography of either subject.

"no substantial progress whatever" is like asserting that since Galvani's experiment with frogs' legs our knowledge of electricity has made no progress whatever. *Raymond,* attracting deserved attention on account of its authorship, is only the latest contribution to innumerable records of a similar kind, the cumulative significance of which is overwhelming, while all who are patient and painstaking get personal conviction for themselves.

Spiritualists for the most part are content with this. They know their departed friends still live and get assurance of their welfare. They look forward with confidence to their own future. Occult students find that, besides evidence of that order, minute information relating to the conditions of the after-life can be obtained by people still in this life when gifted with clairvoyant faculties of an appropriate kind. Abundant information is accumulating in the literature of occult research along these lines. In no department of human activity has more remarkable progress been made during the last thirty years than in this branch of superphysical science. That progress has carried the occult student far beyond elementary discoveries relating to the immediate experiences of the next life. Certainly these are intensely interesting, but do not in themselves enable us to obtain a comprehensive grasp of the whole scheme of evolution to which humanity belongs. Comprehension of the next phase of life marks a great advance beyond the crass ignorance that doubts or denies even that, but it only helps us relatively a little way in the direction of understanding our place in Nature and our ultimate destinies. Later developments of occult science enable us to appreciate both the value and limitations of spiritualism. The mediumship on which it relies is better understood now than at first. Physical phenomena are brought about when certain invisible factors in the medium's constitution can be withdrawn for use by *elemental* agency. Messages come through when certain *organs in the medium's* body respond to subtle vibra-

tions that most people fail to perceive. But the medium in either case is a passive instrument in the hands of invisible operators, and these are of all varieties. That accounts for the nonsense that often discredits the method. The lower regions of the next world swarm with the (morally and intellectually) lower classes of humanity dying constantly by thousands, and (for a time at all events) remaining as unintelligent as they were in life. Their influences and messages are ignoble and stupid, but even then they serve their purpose. They show us in touch with another plane of existence. And meanwhile more enlightened inhabitants of that plane also communicate, as the literature of spiritualism shows.

But spiritualism, having broken down the deadly materialism into which thought was drifting during the last century, paved the way for the development of occult science. The later literature referred to above illuminates its origin and progress. The new view of Evolution, of human destiny, and the economy of Nature generally, which it has unfolded to us, cannot be fully interpreted within the limits of a Review article, but may be broadly suggested.

The stupendous conception of the future which shows that physical life has spiritual progress for its purpose, that this world is the region in which that progress has to be accomplished, that other realms of existence are the regions in which the work done here bears fruit, and provides for invigorating rest, leads us to the important conception that each physical life is merely one of a series; that whatever experiences intervene between each we shall all of us come back again and again to life of the kind we are familiar with here, that Reincarnation is as certain a law of Nature as the circulation of the blood.

Reincarnation when first scientifically defined some thirty-odd years ago was quickly seen to solve many previously insoluble problems. The hideous inequalities

of human condition no longer seemed to insult Divine justice. Suffering became intelligible when the conditions of each life were realised as the consequences of previous "doing" (or Karma). The superficial objection, that the sufferer did not remember his former misdoing, was dissipated as we realised that the Higher Self did so, and profited by each physical plane experience. Further knowledge showed that humanity is still in its youth. A few more advanced than the multitude *do* remember former lives. The whole course of reasoning need not be repeated here. The appreciation of re-birth as essential to a comprehension of human life is already widely spread. By reason of misunderstanding details many people regard it with dislike, and the dislike has been accentuated by the eagerness of those who seized upon it at first to deal with it as though it covered all mysteries of the future. To think of the future as simply a return to this life is as great a blunder as to think of the life which opens up to the person just set free from the physical body, by *its* death, as entering an everlasting existence of a superphysical order. Only by failing to understand it correctly can anyone fall into the habit of criticising the Divine scheme of evolution unfavourably. The personality of a brutal criminal in the slums is clearly not fit for eternal perpetuation. The bishop in his palace, if he honestly considers the matter, will come to the same conclusion as regards himself. "We are ancients of the Earth," etc., and, as we look back on those who millions of years ago were more ancient still, we can see how better worth perpetuation we shall be when wider experiences of life shall have lifted us as far beyond our present condition as we now are beyond that of our Stone Age predecessors—ourselves in former lives. Probably, indeed, there will be no stage of growth from which the perpetuation of that stage would be conceivable. Spiritual progress must be infinite, *but with that which* lies beyond the perfection of

humanity we can only be concerned much later on. Our present purpose should be to understand the laws of reincarnation so as to realise that it does not conflict in any way with the wide-ranging possibilities of life on higher realms after bodily death, and to understand *that* life so as to realise that it does not interfere with the necessity of returning here to gather fresh experience and get ready for loftier spiritual enlightenment on happier levels again. Those of us who have taken adequate advantage of modern opportunities need not speculate about the chances of survival after death. That is utterly familiar knowledge, and, with varying facilities, many of us are in communication with friends who have passed on, though it does not always happen that these have acquired any scientific comprehension of their own destinies beyond the stage actually reached. Even for those of us here who have taken best advantage of current opportunities there are horizons beyond which our knowledge does not extend, but the region in which people wake up after they have discarded the physical vehicle of consciousness is already a *pays de connaissance* for many of us, and there is pathos as well as absurdity in the fact that, for much larger numbers, conventional teaching has left them still in doubt whether there is any waking up at all.

"The Astral Plane" is the term generally used by occultists to designate the vast realm of unseen life immediately surrounding this globe. It is not a well-chosen term, as the region in question has nothing to do with the stars, but it has become rooted in occult phraseology, and we cannot now escape from its use. It is really a vast concentric sphere of matter that does not appeal to our physical senses; far greater in size than the physical globe it embraces, including an enormous variety of conditions, some of them highely disagreeable; but of these it is needless to speak for the moment, as the vast majority of decently behaved people will have nothing to do with them but will pass

at once, when free of the body, to regions where they will find themselves happier than they are likely to have ever been, even under favourable circumstances, in the physical life. Naturally the character of such happiness is determined by the use that has been made of the earth life and the extent of spiritual development that the Soul (or Ego) has reached in its long progress through the ages, its innumerable immersions in physical life, its former incarnations. The distribution of the varied conditions is well understood by those among us whose faculties are equal to the task of cognising astral conditions, but for people who are not merely without such faculties, but have not been in touch with those who do enjoy them, some explanation is needed in reference to matter and sense-perception.

Wihout plunging into metaphysics in the direction of Berkeley, it is obvious that the reality of matter for us is due to the appeal it makes to our senses. Even on this plane some kinds of matter—most gases—make no appeal to the sense of sight, but we know of them by means of other senses, other avenues to consciousness. But most of us have no senses through which astral matter can affect our consciousness. Many, however, have, and that is the whole secret of "clairvoyance," the actuality of which as a faculty in some people is no longer the subject of any sane denial. Clairvoyants can in some cases *see* the forms in which astral life is expressed. For the most part their astral senses are partially smothered by their association with physical senses. Those, however, who can—as the phrase goes—get out of the body, and exist prematurely in the astral plane, in the vehicle of consciousness that will not be in perfect order for use until the physical body, at death, is finally got rid of, such persons become at once fully conscious of the astral realm, and—this is the important point to realise—cease for the *time to be conscious* of the physical realm. It does *not exist for them* any more than the astral world

exists for the commonplace man in the street. All this is not guesswork or metaphysical speculation. It is the definite result of observation as scientific in its character as that concerned with astronomy or spectroscopic analysis. And the final result is that we are now in a position to know that, when we look up into the sky and see nothing between us and the stars, we are really looking through a realm as rich in detail as the landscape we can see on a fine day from a mountain top. This region is inhabited by myriads of the human family, amongst them many we have loved and lost and will rejoin in due time, pending, at a far remoter date, our return together to this laborious nether world in which we have to work for any grand results above that may crown our ultimate endeavours.

The astral world is not merely a concentric sphere surrounding the physical globe, it is—one within another—a series of concentric spheres, generally spoken of by occult scientists as "sub-planes." Counting from below upwards, the first and second, actually immersed in the body of the earth, are regions of suffering with which none but the very worst offenders against Divine laws have anything to do. The third sub-plane, above the earth's surface, is still a comfortless region in which people who have been too deeply absorbed by the lower interests of physical life may have to spend a period of purification before ascending to happier levels; but this vast and highly varied range of experience may be ignored for the moment, as it need not disturb the apprehensions either of people who lead fairly wholesome lives while incarnated, or of the large numbers of gallant victims of the War who, on passing over, find the normal consequences of minor shortcomings obliterated by the sacrifice they have made of their lives in a noble cause. They, and the fairly well behaved majority, will slip through the third sub-level without finding themselves entangled in it, and awake *to consciousness* on the fourth level of the astral world,

the circumstances of which are almost infinitely varied but on which, however varied, happiness is the underlying principle of all sensation and experience.

Obviously the conditions that make for happiness will be very different for people who, however creditable in a humble way their earth lives may have been, do not represent advanced intellectual development. The great man of science, for example, and the simplest maid-servant may share one characteristic. Both may regard some other human beings with genuine love. Their happiness on the fourth level will involve reunion with such persons if these have passed on first, ultimate reunion in either case; and if they have to wait for this there will be partial reunion meanwhile, for the Egos of people in physical life are, especially during sleep, in closer touch with the astral plane than they realise in the normal waking state. But the highly advanced Egos, the great men of science and others, have capacities for the enjoyment of other astral opportunities over and above those relating to personal affections. On higher levels of the astral, to which such capacities would be automatically the passport, magnificent opportunities for the expansion of knowledge, along the lines already laid down in physical life, would open out. And for such Egos centuries of glorious intellectual achievement are provided by the opportunities of the higher astral levels. They will all come back to incarnation eventually, for no matter how great they may be, measured by our present standards, they are merely on the way towards the summit possibilities of human evolution; but there is no hurry, and as a matter of fact, all the great scientists, poets, and artists of the last three hundred years or more are still on the higher levels of the astral world, even though they may have access to still higher realms, and may avail themselves of that privilege from time to time. The higher astral levels, for intricate reasons, are especially adapted for the expansion of such knowledge and capacity as they generally desire.

Those loftier levels share some characteristics with the fourth level, but are less earth-like in their superficial aspect. The conditions of the lower fourth—for the sub-planes include much variety—are curiously earth-like. Life there is free from all the tiresome lower needs we are troubled with, but people live there in houses, enjoy beautiful scenery and social intercourse, although the delightful principles that prevail there sort them, so to speak, into congenial groups, besides respecting the individual attachments of a genuine character passed on from the love experiences of the earth life. The progress upward, towards sublime spiritual heights ultimately attainable by all human beings, is a gradual progress, just as the acorn becomes the oak by degrees, not between to-day and to-morrow. If anyone is discontented with this explanation because he thinks of a beloved daughter (for instance) as turned into an angel of light the day after death, and in touch with the throne of omniscience, he has failed to appreciate the magnificence of the scale on which human perfection is gradually developed. Some of us may already be exquisite in goodness, as we measure character, some of us already splendid in intellectual grandeur, but infinitude is a long story. Eternity cannot be hustled. The achievement of the modern occultist has to do with the illumination of the relatively immediate future.

And some details of that fascinating period are already within the range of our comprehension. Astral matter is plastic to the creative power of thought. With a vivid imagination here we can mentally almost vizualise objects we might desire to possess. On the astral plane under similar conditions, the things desired—appropriate clothing, for example, pictures, furniture, houses even—would assume objective reality, and even durability when many creative thoughts co-operate. But as familiarity wtih the delightful freedom from body necessities that the astral life confers enables people gradually to realise that they do not need

houses, furniture, and so on, those cease to make their appearance on the higher levels, where scenes of natural beauty provide all the wants of inhabitants incapable of fatigue, hunger, or thirst, unconscious of either heat or cold. They may be fully conscious, none the less, of the intellectual interests they have been concerned with in physical life, and may continue in touch with the progress of art or discovery down here, in a way it is hardly possible to describe in a few words.

This outline sketch of the astral life could, indeed, be filled in with much further detail and even be supplemented wtih some description of planes or spheres higher and beyond the astral. But in attempting to conditions that defy the resources of language. For condition that defy the resources of language. For every Ego indeed, each experience of astral life must come to an end sooner or later, though it may extend to many centuries of our time, and must almost always culminate in some touch with the lofty plane beyond; but for the humbler, less developed entities this touch would hardly involve consciousness, would merely be the prelude to an unconscious plunge back into incarnation. The better understanding of that plunge by the great many people in the present day who recognise the necessity of reincarnation as a principle, but dislike the idea for want of comprehending its method, is supremely desirable.

The law applies to all, but is so elastic as to fit in with very different volumes of circumstance. First we must remember that Egos ripe for reincarnation represent very different stages of development. The humblest of these, leaving out quite savage races that we need not think about for the moment, is not a very expanded being when, after a long stay on the astral, he has shed all memories of his last life, and remains its spiritual nucleus. The law, guided by divine agency, *puts* that spiritual nucleus in touch with a new birth, *and there is not* much consciousness left on higher

planes to be thought of as the Higher Self of the new personality. But in the case of the highly developed entity astral experience, instead of obliterating unimportant memories, has enormously expanded those that are important. The Ego as it stands ready for reincarnation is a being on the Astral Plane of immense complication, built up by the experience of many lives in the past, by that of many intervening astral episodes. He is probably something much more than can be fully expressed in its next immersion in physical matter. He will remain, all through the earth life to come, the Higher Self of the visible entity, of which the visible entity in its physical brain will have but little consciousness. But, by the hypothesis, enough of the real complete being will be expressed on the physical plane to make the new incarnation greater than ever along the lines of its former growth. If a great scientist before, a greater scientist again. If a great poet, a greater, and so on. But the point to be emphasised for the moment is that, while the new body is growing, the actual great intellectual being destined to use it at maturity is doing little more than looking on from above. If that idea can once be properly grasped, it does away with the fear some people seem to feel, to the effect that *they* with their present volume of consciousness will have to go through babyhood and all the experiences of the nursery when they come back to earth life. During all that time *they* will simply be looking on from above. To understand fully how it will come to pass that the baby and the young child will in a certain sense be conscious also, is very difficult for most of us, but, however faintly, that is what has to be realised. There is so little of the real Ego in the new child up to seven years of age that, if it dies within that time, the trace of consciousness it has been expressing simply reverts to the Higher Self, who makes another attempt a little later on and begins to animate a new form, not infrequently in the same family

as the first. The mother's pretty belief that a later child is her first baby restored to her is often the outcome of a literal scientific truth.

If all goes well, the first seven years of the new child's life is spent in the growth of certain invisible accessories of the body, which medical science will sooner or later be concerned with investigating. And, again, the next seven years are spent in further developments of the same order, but by the time the boy or girl is fourteen a good deal of the real entity is beginning to express itself. Not the whole by any means, nor even the whole of that part designed for expression in the new life. But now the old astral is beginning to be wanted no more. In the new life the Ego is forming for itself a new astral. The Higher Self remaining in touch with lofty planes will, for any expression it may need on the astral plane, make use of the new astral. Of course all these changes fade one into another like dissolving views. Nature is rarely addicted to abrupt metamorphoses.

Mutatis mutandis, the process of incarnation as described above with reference to a well-developed Ego is applicable also to people at intervening stages of growth. The return to physical life is never attended by inconveniently premature consciousness in the new body. Or this broad rule is only in rare cases partially infringed. Here and there, for example, young children have been known to show musical talent at a ridiculously early age. In such cases the Ego of the great musician in the background is so eager to express itself on the physical plane that it cannot wait till the new instrument is properly tuned for the task. But even Mozarts who play the piano at six are not all there. Their condition is so exceptional that it need not be minutely examined in connexion with any sweeping survey of the laws governing reincarnation.

But one essential principle must never be forgotten. *Guided by supreme* wisdom and power, each new in-

carnation is conditioned by the merit or demerit of the Ego returning to physical life. Students of heredity generally make the mistake of supposing that ancestral attributes are the cause of characteristics reproduced in the descendant. The descendant has been planted in that family because bodily heredity would there provide it with a physical vehicle qualified to give expression to its own inner nature. And, beyond this, because the circumstances of that life's programme fit in with the requirements of absolute justice as regards the claims of the Ego for happiness or its deserts as regards trouble. The infinite skill of the Divine power regulating the details of each re-birth blends the intellectual or artistic necessities of the Ego with a worldly environment appropriate to its normal condition, its good or bad "Karma," as the case may be. The working of this law is intensely interesting and marvellously intricate. The consequences of good or bad action in one life partly reflect themselves, to begin the explanation, in happiness or the reverse during the astral life. But that is only the first part of the story. A fundamental law, equivalent, on higher levels of nature, to the conservation of energy in mechanics, asserts itself with every entity coming back to incarnation in the earth life. Moral action, good or bad, must bear consequences from life to life. The external conditions, the happiness or the reverse of each life, are the expression of forces set in activity during the previous life, or sometimes going back behind that, during previous lives. And, again though they cannot controvert that law, aspirations in any given life, when sustained and intense, are an important factor in generating the environment of the next. To work with the simplest example, a person in a humble rank of life may be wishing all the time that he or she belonged to a superior class. The longing would have no effect if it were to vague. A carpenter thinking he would like to be a king does not know enough about the kingly

life to long for it with precision. But he knows a good deal about the conditions of social life just a little above his own. He may or may not long for these, according to the measure of his contentment in his own station, but if he does long for them he does so with precision, with exact comprehension of what he wants, and then such longing becomes a natural force tending to colour his next incarnation. And the principle really operates so widely as to bring about a gradual upward drift in social station of the innumerable Egos emerging from the humble levels of existence. Of course that is merely a broad rule subject to frequent exceptions. Sometimes the Karma of a life spent on high levels may necessitate a plunge to lower, but normally the aspirations of our life do contribute to engender the environment of the next.

Thus in thinking of future Life and lives we have to recognise the twofold character of the consequences ensuing from the manner in which each life is spent. That definitely affects both the immediate future and the ultimate future; more specifically it colours life on the astral plane after the death of one body, and determines the welfare or suffering of the next incarnation. For people who have led fairly creditable lives the astral period is happy and restful, often associated with opportunities of doing useful work. Even when the previous life has been faulty in some respects, it may be that such misdoing has been of a kind so exclusively identified with physical life that it can only give rise to consequences on this plane again in the next earth life. But when the misdirection of activity has been of a kind that deeply colours the surviving consciousness of the Ego, it may entangle him, when first passing on, in the third level of the astral world. That is a region of varied discomfort in which people have to realise the nature of their misdoing and shed the desires that have given rise to it. In bad cases that are not of the supremely bad order, the purification may be rather a slow process

but assuming that the character of the person going though it is tainted merely,—not predominantly evil,—the ultimate passage to the happy levels already (very imperfectly) described is assured, not merely in the long run, but very likely in a short one.

In awfully serious cases the course of astral life is very different. There is one variety of human wickedness that is altogether in a different category from those that are mere vices. The sinful character of these—the mere vices—is often exaggerated; but cruelty, that worst and horrible form of cruelty which takes actual pleasure in the infliction of and sight of pain and suffering in others, is an attribute that drives the authors of such hideous misdoing down into that appalling submerged level of the astral world with which most of those even in need of purification have nothing whatever to do. Even that region must be thought of as purgatorial. Its fearful experiences may at last cure, or begin the cure of the most ghastly offenders against the Dinive law of love (of which cruelty is the exact reverse). But imagination shrinks from the attempt to realise the details of the sufferings incidental to existence on the terrible submerged level. Their duration, in the worst cases, may be counted in centuries of our time. In others, a brief experience of this character may give rise to the needful revulsion of feeling. But though it would be unwise to attempt a survey of the astral world without taking cognisance of its lower depths, it would be worse than unwise to refer to them in any way that could excite fear on the part of harmless innocent people too prone, as a consequense of clumsy religious teaching, to imagine themselves "miserable sinners." Talk of that kind is for the most part silly nonsense, culminating in something much worse when associated with ghastly imaginings concerning eternal sufferings in hell. No decorous language is equal to the emergency in dealing with the criminal folly of those who terrify children

and insult God by describing burning tortures to be inflicted for ever on hapless victims of Providential atrocities. Nature does provide a penitential reformatory for souls of diabolical criminality, but even there reformation is the purpose in view. It need only be thought of as completing the broad conception of after-death conditions that modern research in spiritual science enables us to form. For the poor innocent "miserabel sinners" of the churches, the view we are now in a position to obtain of happy life on the higher levels of the astral world is that with which they are personally concerned. But that view even is in need of amplification. The *merely* happy restful life to which people of ordinarily good life may confidently look forward is not the only possibility that the astral world holds out. To understand the design of the future correctly, we must realise first of all that the whole scheme of evolution provides for a gradual progress, through many earth lievs and many episodes on higher planes, towards a condition enormously superior to that yet attained by the most advanced representatives of current civilisation on earth. By most of the human family, such conditions will ultimately be attained after periods of time that are bewildering to the imagination. But when the distant possibilities of human evolution are fairly well comprehended in advance, in the light of such teaching as occult research (and modern revelation) enables us now to deal with, we see that it is possible for those who appreciate the opportunities available to make a much more rapid progress than is provided for by the natural drift of events in reference to the multitude. Some members of the human family have been able to accomplish this long ages ago, and already stand on levels of progress on which they become agents of Divine purpose in promoting the spiritual growth of mankind. These are referred to in occult literature as *the Masters of* Wisdom, and they are always ready to *help forward the* abnormal progress of people who have

acquired some comprehension of their place in Nature, and are filled with eagerness to get on as rapidly as possible in the direction of those great heights. The earth life is the opportunity for beginning such efforts. In this supremely important aspect of the subject, as in minor matters, the earth life is the period for sowing all spiritual seed. The astral life is the period in which it begins to bear fruit. A perfectly commonplace earth life, however harmless and innocent, bears apppropriate fruit in the astral world in the shape of happiness and rest. An aspiration during earth life towards real spiritual growth, coloured by such knowledge as is now available for all, bears fruit in the shape of personal touch with those Masters of Wisdom who may guide the aspirant to incarnations in which he may accomplish results the dignity and grandeur of which cannot easily be exaggerated. Something beyond mere personal happiness is then seen to be the object of attainment. This world is the expression of Divine Will; it is governed by Divine Law, but it is, so to speak, managed in detail by the agents of Divine Will evolved from the scheme itself. To become a part of, to be identified with that sublime agency, is the goal aimed at by those who fully realise the true meaning of spiritual growth. That such a condition involves a species of exalted beatitude which is something greater than and beyond personal happiness is a thought that may fairly be associated with true spiritual aspiration, but one that does not cover the whole idea, too subtle perhaps for clear definition in language, though some trace of it should always colour, for advanced thinkers, all reference to the changes inaugurated by each physical death. When the grave swallows any particular vehicle of consciousness that we have done with, it certainly marks an important stage of our progress through the infinitudes of life, and represents a very tiresome circumstance, connected with this early period of human evolution; but only while we are suffering from the sad

imperfections of conventional teaching is the grave surrounded with terror.

The purpose of this article has not been merely to dissipate that terror, but to elucidate, for those who may long since have ceased to feel it, the detailed circumstances of the passage to the life beyond. And above all, to show how the all-important principle of reincarnation does not in any way conflict with natural aspirations for spiritual existence after bodily death. Reincarnation is no hurried process. There is plenty of time in Eternity. Does anyone imagine that a thousand years of spiritual life after the fatigues of this one will not be enough for him? If he continues hereafter to entertain that view, then he will have more. Or if he has no such far-reaching aspiration, and finds himself content with the simple enjoyment of the astral life on its less exalted levels, he will fall asleep and drift back to physical life in obedience to natural law at the appropriate time. And both in his case and in that of his more advanced contemporaries, the return to physical life will be accomplished as easily as the processes of sleep and waking during physical life, with the inner mechanism of which, for that matter, most people are no better acquainted than with the method of re-birth, the fullest acquaintance with which carries with it the most complete acquiescence in the wisdom, beauty and harmony of the whole design.